

BIRD WATCH

OUR WINTER GARDEN VISITORS

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No matter where you go, towns, cities, urban areas, parks and the countryside, you are sure to see some birds – even in the depths of winter when all the vegetation is dead and not a flower to be seen. So what birds might you encounter during those winter months?

The Robin needs no introduction, and can be a common sight in parks and gardens looking for small invertebrates amongst the dead leaves. Distinctive with their orange breasts, they are fiercely territorial with males attacking other Robins that may come into their territory. They are not afraid of people and will come very close if you are cultivating the ground, ready to catch that unearthed worm. The Robin was originally known as Redbreast, but in the 15th Century, it became popular to give human names to familiar species, and so Robin Redbreast was used, later the Redbreast was dropped from the name.

Although in serious decline, another bird that enjoys the company of humans is the House Sparrow. They love to congregate along the top of our hedge, all chattering to one another as though they do not have a care in the world. They are found in most urban and rural areas and feed mostly on seeds but will also take insects and many other foods. They are commonly attracted to the bird table. The House Sparrow was one of the first animals to be given a scientific name in the modern system of biological classification.

The bold looking Blackbird with its distinctive orange beak is another bird that frequents our gardens, parks and rural areas. They are very territorial; although when the weather is exceptionally bad they will tolerate other blackbirds within their own territory. They eat a wide variety of foods, mainly insects and earthworms, but will also take fruit. During very cold spells of weather, if you cut an apple in half and throw it on the lawn, it will not be long before a blackbird will arrive to eat its share. The first recorded name of "Blackbird" was made in 1486.

The Blue Tit is a common bird in our gardens, especially in the winter months when it is found hanging from the peanut feeder, as they are very agile birds. They have a distinctive blue and yellow plumage, and are sometimes confused with the brighter and larger Great Tit. They like to nest in tree holes but will happily occupy a nest box in your garden. Although preferring insects and spiders, during the winter they are happy to take seeds and other foods offered. The Blue Tit will form winter flocks, which can include Great Tits as well. They will roost in evergreen trees and ivy if the weather is particularly cold.

The Great Tit is larger than the Blue Tit and has a black head and neck with prominent white cheeks and yellow underparts.

Both Blue and Great Tits are vocal birds and will make a loud "tink" sound if alarmed. Other sounds include "teacher, teacher" and also the sound of a squeaky wheelbarrow wheel.

Less common, but still members of the tit family are our Coal Tits and Long Tailed Tits. The Coal Tit has a distinctive grey black cap and a white patch at the back of the neck. In winter months they will join up with flocks





Blackbird (image: annaboogoo)